

Laird is Leaving White House Staff

Washington

Melvin R. Laird resigned as President Nixon's chief domestic counselor yesterday and appealed to the House to decide by March 15 whether it will impeach the President.

Laird predicted that an impeachment resolution would fail, but said it should be brought up for a vote because the continuing Watergate controversy is hurting America's foreign, domestic and national security policies.

The former congressman who served as Mr. Nixon's first term defense secretary and joined the White House staff as a counselor last June said he was not expressing Mr. Nixon's own view in calling for a House vote by March 15.

But Laird's comments were combined with a growing Republican push to settle the impeachment issue as rapidly as possible.

Representative Peter W. Rodino, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said yesterday he hopes the panel will complete its investigation by April.

Laird, who will become an executive of the Reader's Digest Association, said he is leaving the White House staff on February 1 — a month later than he had originally planned. He said Mr. Nixon and Vice President Gerald R. Ford has asked him to stay on to help with preparation of the State of the Union and budget messages.

Laird rejected reports he was unhappy because Mr. Nixon had failed to heed his political advice. "I don't have disappointments," he said. "... this is the time I can make the break and I do not believe this should be interpreted in any way that I am a quitter."

In a resignation letter to Mr. Nixon dated December 17, Laird repeated what he had said earlier — that Ford can and should take over his congressional liaison and domestic adviser duties.

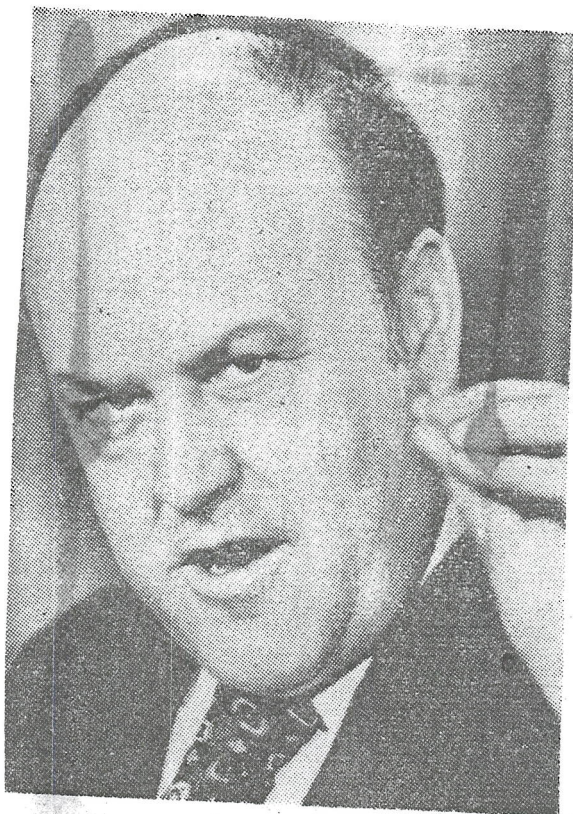
In response, Mr. Nixon hailed Laird's 30 years of public service and added:

"More than anything else I have valued your loyal friendship during this difficult period. It has been a constant source of reassurance to me and words cannot adequately convey how much I appreciate your steadfastness."

Laird had said several weeks ago that he would be leaving the White House soon after Ford's confirmation as vice president.

Another presidential counselor Bryce Harlow, is reported ready to step down early next year, too.

Associated Press



AP Wirephoto

DOMESTIC ADVISER MELVIN LAIRD
He urged prompt action on impeachment